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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000149

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [EFIN](#) [CU](#) [HO](#)  
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ZELAYA MEETS FIDEL AND SPEAKS OUT  
AGAINST CAPITALISM DURING VISIT TO CUBA

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Zelaya concluded his three-day visit to Cuba March 4 with a reported meeting with Fidel Castro, who he described as lucid and well. Zelaya traveled to Cuba to attend the 11th International Encounter of Economists on Globalization and Development problems, before which he gave a populist-themed speech criticizing the international economic system and advocating for the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). Two bilateral agreements were purported to have been signed: a trade accord and an agreement to bolster cooperation in the health field. After a letter signed by Fidel initially lamented that he was unable to meet with Zelaya, a second letter detailed their encounter. Castro was quoted as speaking favorably about Zelaya and his speech. A photo has not yet been published, fueling rumors in Hondurans that the meeting may have only been a telephone conversation. End summary.

¶2. (U) Zelaya traveled to Havana to address the 11th International Encounter of Economists on Globalization and Development Problems on March 4. His populist-themed speech hit the various issues that Latin American leaders have traditionally addressed with regards to Cuba, including respect for the island's sovereignty against U.S. pressure, and opposition to the U.S. embargo, which Zelaya described as "absurd" and "ignominious." He criticized the international economic system, saying that the economies of Latin American found themselves excluded from the international debate on the economic crisis that directly involves them. Zelaya blamed neoliberalism for having "robbed" Latin America of its cultural identity; he urged Latin America to integrate under new forms of association and development similar to ALBA.

¶3. (SBU) According to press, Honduran Trade Minister Fredis Cerrato signed an inter-institutional agreement to increase trade during the visit. The Honduran Commission on Private Enterprise (COHEP) supported this agreement. (Comment: Our sources tell us this is a minimalist, partial trade accord; Honduran-Cuban trade is currently negligible. End Comment.) The Ministries of Health of the two countries were also purported to have signed an agreement to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the health field. (Note: Read more Cuban

doctors to the Honduran countryside.)

¶4. (SBU) Press reporting on Zelaya's meeting with Fidel was inconsistent. This, along with the lack of photos showing the meeting, led to speculation in Honduras that it had not actually taken place. The Presidential palace issued a press release on March 4 that Zelaya had met with Fidel Castro after his meeting with Raul Castro. Zelaya was then quoted in the March 5 Honduran press as reporting that Fidel was lucid and well. Granma, however, issued a letter signed by Fidel that discussed his meeting with Dominican President Fernandez, lamenting that he had not had time to meet with Zelaya. The record appeared to have been set straight on March 6 with a four-page article signed by Fidel confirming the meeting and flattering Zelaya for his speech. The letter quoted Zelaya as having said that "the capitalist system is the most repugnant concept of justice that has ever happened to the human race" and that Zelaya has a "profound aversion to the economic system of the United States." Fidel lamented that Zelaya is a man who has "suffered profoundly the abuses of imperialism." The letter details the conversation held between the two. Honduran pundits are therefore speculating that the meeting may have actually been a telephone conversation. Zelaya's personal secretary, however, told the DCM that the meeting had taken place, with only Zelaya and his daughter participating.

¶5. (C) Comment: On the heels of a highly-successful trip to Washington and Colorado to explore renewable energy, Zelaya traveled to Cuba to burnish his populist credentials and attempt to balance the scales between the U.S. and his leftist friends. He is trying hard to keep both sides happy with his rhetoric, as he hopes to continue to receive benefits from both the United States and the members of ALBA.

As to whether or not the meeting with Fidel actually took place, many Hondurans will remain skeptical until they see the photos. End comment.

LLORENS